

**THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCIL
REGIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE FORUM – TENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT (AUGUSTA)
SUMMARY REPORT**

The Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) is statutorily charged with the responsibility of convening stakeholders statewide to assist in the development, prioritization and publication of state and local policy agenda for the criminal justice system. To this end, on March 22, 2012, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council hosted its second Regional Criminal Justice Forum for part of the Tenth Judicial District in Augusta, GA. Local participants at the forum represented the following agencies:

- Augusta Probation Office
- Augusta Day Reporting Center
- Augusta Judicial Circuit Drug Court
- Augusta Judicial Circuit Superior Court
- Augusta Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office
- Augusta Judicial Circuit Public Defender's Office
- Burke County State Court
- Burke County Juvenile Court
- Columbia County Juvenile Court
- Richmond County Solicitor General's Office
- Toombs Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office
- Victims' Services Organizations:
 - Child Enrichment Inc.
 - Peace Place Inc.
 - Rape Crisis and Sexual Assault Services
 - Safe Homes of Augusta

In addition, the following state agencies were represented:

- Administrative Office of the Courts of Georgia (AOC)
- Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)
- Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI)
- Georgia Public Defender Standards Council (GPDSC)
- State Board of Pardons and Paroles (SBPP)

CJCC staff, along with the guidance and assistance of Kay Chopard Cohen, Deputy Director of the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA), facilitated the forum and recorded this event. Attendees provided expertise and practitioner perspective to the forum to establish a dialogue of ideas and identification of issues affecting the Augusta region.

Identifying Regional Priorities

Forum participants identified the region's top priorities¹ and in group discussions further detailed the challenges and barriers that inhibit resolutions. After exchanging issue perspectives, participants were encouraged to offer possible solutions for each priority identified. The following table provides a summary of the issues and potential solutions².

Regional Priorities Identified by Augusta Forum Participants

<i>Regional Priorities:</i>	<i>Issues:</i>	<i>Suggested Solutions and Potential Funding Priorities:</i>
LACK OF RESOURCES FOR STAFFING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of staff across all facets of the criminal justice system• Lack of funding for personnel• Inadequate training for personnel• Increased staffing reduction• Outdated training at academies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide funding for qualified staff• Improve budgeting practices throughout the entire system instead of passing out cuts• Fund and develop better training programs for personnel
LACK OF RESOURCES FOR MENTALLY ILL OFFENDERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of mental health court services for juvenile, mentally ill offenders• Insufficient means of evaluation for mentally ill offenders• Inadequate supervision of the mentally ill• Lack of alternative and treatment services for mentally ill offenders• Inability of mentally ill offenders to pay for health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement more mental health courts• Provide mentally ill with needed medication and housing• Conduct a cost/benefit analysis of jail versus mental institution services• Fund mental health court services aimed for juvenile mentally ill• Provide Department of Public Health with funding and support to deliver programs
LACK OF RESOURCES FOR SEX OFFENDERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shelters for homeless sex offenders are not aligned with proximity laws• There is a reluctance to provide sex offenders with treatment and employment program services• Decreased reporting of sex offenders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fund and support programs that provide sex offenders with community re-entry services• Establish a focused strategy on how to deal with sex offenders so victims and families of victims will not continuously suffer

¹ Each participant used the three stickers provided by CJCC staff to identify their top three priorities. Items with the most stickers were then selected for detailed discussion. For a complete list of all identified regional needs, refer to Attachment A.

² For program descriptions, refer to Attachment B.

Regional Priorities Identified by Augusta Forum Participants (Cont.)

ACCOUNTABILITY COURT MODEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staffing is not enough to support number of offenders in the system• Lack of comprehensive statewide drug control policy• Insufficient in-prison RSAT• Absence of standards across the board• Lack of funding and coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish best practices for arrests• Fund and support RSAT and CIP programs• Introduce significant alternative sentencing options• Encourage collaborative efforts between DOC and accountability courts• Provide funding for staffing and central clearinghouses
JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of space for youth detention centers• Juvenile justice courts lack full-time judges• Insufficient number of prevention programs for the Department of Juvenile Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employ parent and team awareness programs in juvenile courts• Collaborative efforts between courts, agencies, and volunteers• Local buildings that stand empty can be used to provide space for youth detention centers• Employ education programs to fight clusters of low graduation rates and under-employment
DFCS SAFETY PLAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of funding for children's programs• DFCS is unwilling to work with courts (no accountability, no transparency to public, no information sharing)• Treatment is unavailable for parents• Participants' files close too early	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement early intervention with families• Raise number of parent/teen awareness programs• Increase community involvement (politicians and volunteers)• Provide DFCS Safety Plans with judicial oversight
PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program staff is not sufficiently trained• The effectiveness of many available programs is questionable.• Absence of standardization in program audits• Lack of preventative programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase funding for staff with capacity• Improve program auditing procedures• Include communication with program stake holders to develop better monitoring• Develop more evidence-based preventative programs

Recurring Themes

After review of forum dialogues, CJCC discovered recurring themes among the issues within the region. Themes included:

1. Offenders need greater support services (e.g., employment opportunities, supportive housing, residential substance abuse treatment, vocational education etc.), not just punitive action to end the cyclical nature of offenders recidivating. Services should be tailored to high risk, high need offenders and be given more non-punitive opportunities to end the revolving door of reoffending.

2. The closing of the mental health facilities in Milledgeville has had a devastating effect on the needs of persons diagnosed with mental illness and the criminal justice system: 1) increasingly, persons afflicted with a mental illness commit crimes simply to have access to shelter, 2) mentally ill offenders generally commit non-violent crimes, for which they are incarcerated – few alternatives; 3) jails, already experiencing problems with overcrowding, do not have sufficient resources to house or treat the number of nonviolent, mentally ill offenders in the system; and 4) the minimal treatment provided is not comprehensive and long-term treatment is essentially non-existent. Services for offenders should be specialized, particularly for mentally ill offenders and those who have high rates of recidivism. A mental health facility needs to be opened to treat persons with mental illness and provide comprehensive services.
3. There are a lack of services, preventive programs and support for juveniles. To prevent children from entering the court system, prevention programs should be introduced in the school system and homes early in a child's life. Once a child enters the system, either as an offender or as a result of a parent/caretakers' actions, the Department of Children and Families, the courts and treatment providers should work collaboratively to develop and implement a plan of action to prevent recidivism or need for future court interaction with the criminal justice system.
4. Collaborative efforts at both the state and local level of government are of great significance to establishing effective and sustainable improvements to the criminal justice system. As shown above, the need for a collaborative approach was a plausible solution to almost every issue identified.

What's Working

At the end of the forum, participants provided further insight by identifying the following cost-saving, innovative practices¹:

- *Residential Substance Abuse Treatment for State Prisoners Program (RSAT)* – RSAT provides offenders access to substance abuse treatment and services to develop skills to be productive members of their communities.
- *Community Impact Program (CIP)* – CIP assists with offenders' return to society by providing drug treatment and counseling.
- *Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children (CASA)* – CASA is a nonprofit organization which offers deprived children with services and advocacy.

The issues, challenges and possible solutions identified are a result of CJCC's staff discussions with the state and local agency representatives who voluntarily participated in the Augusta forum. CJCC staff acknowledges that the information obtained is not a complete list of all of the criminal justice issues in the region, but a representation of the region's priorities.

¹ For more information on each program, please refer to Attachment B

Attachment A: Regional Needs Identified by Augusta Forum Participants

Training

- Accessibility to updated law enforcement training at academies
- Increase in training for prevention program staff

Programs

- Funding for existing programs demonstrated to be effective
- Assessments to test existing programs' effectiveness
- Increase in program monitoring
- Improvements in program auditing
- More preventative programs

Mentally Ill

- Referral services for juvenile mental health offenders
- Transportation for mental health offenders who need evaluation
- Assistance to pay for health services
- More mental health courts
- Life skills programs for mental health offenders
- Housing and medication after release

Sex Offenders

- Treatment services for sex offenders
- Increase in reporting of sex offenders
- More shelters for homeless sex offenders
- Develop employment programs for sex offenders

Juvenile Justice System

- Facilities for youth detention centers
- More full-time judges for juvenile courts
- Richmond/Burke counties need two full-time judges for their juvenile court
- Prevention and education programs to target low graduation rates, high teen pregnancy rates and under-employment
- More volunteers to assist in programs

Accountability Courts

- Increase in funding for direct services.
- Establish a comprehensive statewide drug control policy.
- More personnel to support number of offenders in the system.
- Additional substance abuse treatment programs.
- Central clearinghouse for employers who need minimum wage workers.
- Establish best practices for arrests.
- Better coordination between DOC and accountability courts to increase employment opportunities for offenders

Staffing/Retention

- Funding for qualified staff
- Establish best practices to spend budgets

Home Life/Parenting

- Increase in early intervention with families
- Mandatory education program in schools about dating violence
- Introduce parent/teen program
- More involvement from community and politicians

Attachment B: Program Description Table

Program	Program Description	Program Goal(s)
Residential Substance Abuse Treatment for State Prisoners (RSAT) Program	RSAT fosters a partnership between correctional staff and the treatment community to create programs in secure settings that help offenders overcome their substance abuse problems and prepare for reentry into society. RSAT programs are structured to deal effectively with substance abuse problems, work with inmates so they may focus on their recovery, and provide staff and resources to address all aspects of substance abusing behavior. ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To provide inmates with substance abuse treatment and skills to obtain employment so they can return as productive members of their communities.
Community Impact Program (CIP)	The Community Impact Program (CIP) is modeled after the existing Savannah Impact Program, which has a focus on supervising on high risk offenders. Based in the local probation office, the CIP program is designed to assist with the offender's return to society by providing drug treatment and counseling. It also leverages collaboration with other law local enforcement agencies, such as the police and parole, to "shadow" current and ex-offenders through the reentry phase. ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To help offenders successfully reenter society by providing access to wraparound services.
Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children (CASA)	Georgia Court Appointed Special Advocates, Inc. develops and supports court-sanctioned, community-based affiliate programs that provide trained and supervised volunteers to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children involved in juvenile court deprivation proceedings. ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To ensure that each abused or neglected child involved in juvenile court proceedings shall have a safe and permanent home.

¹ U.S. Department of Justice. (2005). *Residential substance abuse treatment for state prisoners (RSAT) program*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/bja/206269.pdf>.

² Georgia Department of Corrections. *Enhancing public safety, holding felons accountable*. Retrieved from <http://www.dcor.state.ga.us/Divisions/Corrections/ProbationSupervision/ProbationSupervision.html>

³ Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children Georgia (CASA). *About us*. Retrieved from <http://www.gacasa.org/mission.php>